

**How Archivists Would Explain the Origins and Importance  
of Archival Documents to Original Creators of These Materials?**

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### **How Archivists Would Explain the Origins and Importance of Archival Documents to Original Creators of These Materials?**

Everything around us (e.g., captured music sound, recorded oral story, drawing on any surface, written piece, taken image, etc.) is potentially collectable and may be preserved in archives, or institutions designed for storage and preservations of records and artifacts (McKemmish, et al., 2005). Evidences in these archives have their own stories, they are, therefore, “palimpsestual” (Archaesoup, 2012). When archivists describe evidence, how can they ensure they preserve original intentions of those who created these materials?

#### **Archivists as Co-Creators**

Archivists add timelines and create stories about evidence. This, however, places an enormous responsibility on the archivists’ shoulders because when something is archived, it becomes a “trace” that is no longer dependent on its origin and is a memory on its own (McKemmish, et al., 2005, p. 2). As Alexander (2021a) suggested, “it is about interactions with evidence.” Archivists describing evidence have their own religious, gender, ethnic, political, etc., biases and these biases affect their archiving decisions. Therefore, archivists when examining evidence, which is fixed, add their own associations to these materials.

Added by archivists, traces may suit a part of “narrative” once included in the future research and publications (Alexander, 2021b). Jackson’s (2018) *They Shall Not Grow Old* film is a great example of using evidence such as written letters by World War I (WWI) British soldiers and archival films to create a story that is seen as a “forensic study” (Alexander, 2021b). This became possible because of the level of details relevant to WWI time that was used by the film director (e.g., missing teeth in actors, actors’ precise accents, re-created scenes with artifacts collected from former battle sites, etc.) (2021b). Herzog’s (2010) *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* film

is another great example of using evidence to tell a compelling story, a story about the 30,000-year-old drawings on the walls of the Chauvet-Pont-d'Arc cave in Southern France.

Archivists-scholars by interacting with evidence and adding their own traces have the power to change the original intentions of those who originally collected the archived materials. Therefore, as McKemmish et al (2005) noted, evidence is “always in a state of becoming” (p. 20). Herzog (2010) in his film *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* was curious about what those who will look at the artifacts in the future would see and “make of them” (1:26.33). Following his example, archivists need to ask themselves what, when, why, and how the evidence was collected when they present palimpsests to the world, to ensure the creator's original intentions are truly represented. Because by adding their own traces, the archivists share responsibility with the original creators, they become co-creators.

### **Importance of Context in Evidence Collection and Description**

Working in the archival science field these days is more exciting than ever; there is a world of new possibilities for archival science. Archivists and special collections librarians have developed new ways and tools (e.g., optical readers for text, metadata, digitization, video synchronization, data mining, and machine learning tools, etc.) to re-discover existing and newly acquired archived evidence and examine other related to such evidence records such as social, economic, political, financial, creator's personal information, etc. The archival science is four-dimensional (creation, capturing, organizing, and pluralization) with perhaps its fourth dimension, pluralization, becoming more important as it is when a single evidence becomes a “collective social, historical and cultural memory” (McKemmish et al, 2005, p. 18). Therefore, a single archival piece may potentially represent a collective memory in the future.

Not only the archived evidence itself is essential, but it is also important how well it represents the time of occurrence, chain of events leading to it, as well as its creator's true intentions. As we may see from the *Children Overboard* example, preserved evidence or "information artifact" may be used to alter representation of factual events when refugees passing their children to rescuers were portrayed as monsters throwing their kids into to water (McKemmish, et al., 2005, p. 11). This means, it is insufficient for archivists to simply read one recorded report (e.g., a single newspaper article) to understand and explain what really happened in a particular event. Archivists need to review and analyze all available evidence about an examined artifact and place it into the context that is related to the evidence's time, place, and social, political, and business activities happening at that time.

### **Effect of New Evidence on the Existing One**

What happens when new evidence is discovered? For example, an oral story told over centuries and transferred from one generation to the next one becomes a "collective memory" (Bastian, 2013, p. 9). However, when a newly surfaced DNA evidence replaces some of the known ancestors in a family tree, it may contradict the existing family legends, as described by Gates, 2008. As per Alexander (2021a), sense of identity is determined by relationships with family traditions, political systems, cultural, and religious values. Gates (2008) suggested there is potentially an additional element, scientific. The existing story may require a revision based on new scientific evidence. Archivists need to be ready to re-examine the existing evidence when new evidence becomes available. Archivists also need to decide if they wish to re-tell a story to include this new evidence.

Archiving is a complex process and it is essential that archivists when preserving evidence place materials into the context. The relevant context is preserved by adding sufficient

descriptors and supporting materials to capture the evidence's time, place, activities, and true creator's intentions. By placing evidence into the context, archivists would have no difficulties explaining the origins and importance of these archival documents to those who originally created these materials.

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